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# TOWN MEETING



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## "ARE OUR COLLEGES SUPPRESSING INDIVIDUALISM?"

### *Speakers:*

PROFESSOR E. MERRILL ROOT

PROFESSOR J. RICHARD WILMETH

### *Moderator:*

DR. SHEPHERD L. WITMAN



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BULLETIN OF AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR

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## "ARE OUR COLLEGES SUPPRESSING INDIVIDUALISM?"

ANNOUNCER: Tonight's TOWN MEETING originates from the Ira J. Taylor Physical Education Building at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln. This broadcast pre-faces a highly significant week on this college campus where tomorrow night will begin the first in an annual Willson Lecture Series, made possible through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. James M. Wilson of Floydada, Texas. Dr. Roy L. Smith, internationally known Methodist clergyman, journalist and lecturer, will serve as the first Willson lecturer. Nebraska Wesleyan University -- with an enrollment of 850 -- is a coeducational, Christian, Liberal Arts college and has served under the auspices of the Methodist Church since its founding in 1887. In addition to a fully accredited academic program, the University is proud of its complete program of extra curricular activities. Nebraska Wesleyan is famous primarily for its outstanding work in the natural sciences and forensics. The University is headed by one of the nation's dynamic young educators -- Dr. A. Leland Forrest.

Now to preside as moderator of our discussion, here is Shepherd L. Witman, Director of Residential Seminars on World Affairs. Dr. Witman!

DR. WITMAN: All over the free world people are trying to resolve differences in political ideas and political programs. These ideas and programs are so numerous and so varied that they defy classification. Nevertheless, in order to get some order out of them, we have variously tried to label them as conservative or liberal or collectivist or individualist or right or left! Now even the labels have come to take on such special meanings that confusion has become compounded. But, no matter what they are called, each of these movements have hearty advocates who seek to convert each of us to their special cause.

As we go through the process of trying to find our way through these competing ideas, it is inevitable that more and more we will ask the question -- What is the responsibility of our colleges in helping or hindering the sound evolution of these ideas? And then, of course, we ask ourselves -- What are the colleges indeed doing now about it?

It is most significant, therefore, that TOWN MEETING address itself to this question on this campus. So tonight, on the campus of Nebraska Wesleyan University at Lincoln, and broadcasting from the impressive Ira J. Taylor Physical Education Building, we raise the issue: "Are Our Colleges Suppressing Individualism?"

The first speaker to give us his views is Professor E. Merrill Root. Professor of English at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana since 1930, E. Merrill Root has written six volumes of poetry and a number of prose books. His latest book, "Collectivism on the Campus," to be published November 3rd, maintains that American colleges have been dominated by collectivism for many years. Mr. Root is a graduate of Amherst College and before joining the Earlham College faculty, he did graduate work at the University of Missouri and at Andover Theological Seminary. It is my great pleasure to present to you, Professor Root!

PROF. ROOT: I am here tonight to affirm the proposition that too many of our colleges are suppressing individualism.

To prove this, I turn not to an individualist, but to a modern liberal -- the Honorable Joseph S. Clark, Jr., formerly the Mayor of Philadelphia. In his article, "Can the Liberals Rally?" in the "Atlantic Monthly" for July, 1953, Mayor Clark first defines a "liberal" as one who believes that government is the proper -- indeed the chief or sole tool with which to build a good world. He then affirms that American colleges today have taken sides for that philosophy and against the basic American

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doctrine which Thomas Jefferson upheld that that government is best which governs least. Mayor Clark said: "There is a vast potential reservoir of political leadership coming from the schools and universities . . . . Moreover, it is a political leadership psychologically prepared to enlist under the liberal banner . . . . spiritually and economically youth is conditioned to respond to a liberal program of orderly policing of our society by government, subject to the popular will, in the interests of social justice."

It is not I, but a liberal, in the modern and not the classic sense, who openly boasts that youth is conditioned into an acceptance of the orderly policing of society by government. I say that if Mayor Clark is right, youth is being indoctrinated into collectivism, and that individualism is being suppressed.

Now contrast with this modern illiberalism the true American liberal or radical: Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson said: "Society everywhere is a conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members . . . . Society never advances; society develops only as man improves . . . . The wise and just man will always feel that he imparts strength to the state, not receives security from it . . . . The first rule of economy is that every man shall maintain himself . . . . The less government we have, the better; the fewer laws and the less confided power. The antidote to this abuse of formal government is the influence of private character, the growth of the individual . . . . In all my lectures, I taught one doctrine, namely, infinitude of the private man."

I affirm that that is the doctrine of individualism; I also affirm that it is, at best, only a whisper today upon too many of our campuses.

I have written a book, "Collectivism on the Campus," in which I document and prove that this is so. I show how professor after professor, how programs, how textbooks, how techniques today do condition youth into what Mayor Clark, with fine candor for which we should all be thankful, calls "the orderly policing of our society by government." And I affirm that that constitutes the suppression of individualism.

DR. WITMAN: Thank you, Professor Root. You have certainly made your position clear and told us where you stand.

Our second speaker will be J. Richard Wilmeth who is Associate Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at the State University of Iowa. After graduation from college, Professor Wilmeth taught high school for five years. He began his career in higher education with an instructorship at Cornell and shortly after that, became an Associate Professor at Northwestern Missouri State. He was teaching at Central Washington College when he received his present appointment to the State University of Iowa. And now, let us hear from you, Professor Wilmeth!

PROF. WIILMETH: We cannot answer tonight's question unless we can agree on the meaning of individualism. I should like to define it as the exercise of choice. Choosing is an individual experience, but it occurs only in situations in which society provides the opportunity to choose. Our task then is to decide whether the possibilities for choice are more restricted in the colleges than in other parts of our society.

Social scientists are often accused of neglecting the individual altogether in their preoccupation with the study of groups. Let me read you one such accusation. This is from Joseph Wood Krutch in "The Measure of Man."

"If a man accepts these assumptions . . . he must surrender for himself as well as for his fellows certain rights, privileges, and dignities which, nevertheless, continue to seem real in the world of his own intimate experience. If the deepest convictions of others are always or even chiefly the results of their conditioning, so must his be. His sense of right and wrong, and his standard of value must be, like theirs, not convictions won by his own independent mind but the predictable results of the environment in which he has lived. Quite literally his soul is no longer his own."

Social scientists probably deserve such criticism if it is a measure of their failure to state their position clearly. We have failed to say, often enough, that for each person society is the source of all that is humanizing. The notion that a person creates himself and his values is, of course, preposterous. But no one is in every respect the predictable outcome of his environment. Every society, it is true, makes certain rigid requirements of every one of its members. Human life could not continue otherwise. But it is also true that every society provides some opportunity for choice among alternative courses of action. Where choice is available, it is possible also to create, to invent -- the very essence of individualism. Differences between nations may be vividly expressed in terms of the alternatives which they offer to individuals. In the same way we may distinguish between communities and institutions in our own society. Where, in the United States of America, are choices most limited and where are they most extensive?

I can think of few environments where alternatives are more plentiful than in our colleges. That, in fact, is one of the reasons why I enjoy being a professor. Every academic career is the result of a unique succession of choices. Our incomes may not be large but where else could we enjoy so much freedom to spend what we do have as we please? And what is true of money is even more true of time. Who has more to say about how he shall spend his hours than a professor? For the student, choice is not only available, it is literally forced upon him. He chooses the curriculum, courses, extra-curricular activities and what we are pleased to call his "leisure hours" may be filled up in a bewildering variety of ways. I do not mean to suggest that this is the happiest of all possible worlds. Choice means decisions and decision-making is notoriously difficult.

I have simply tried to show that individualism can exist when society provides a range of alternatives at a particular time and place. Our colleges provide such opportunities in rich abundance. As long as this is true, the charge that they are suppressing individualism is difficult to support.

DR. WITMAN: You, too, have made your position very clear and I can detect at once that the two of you gentlemen don't agree on all points so I think the best thing to do at this moment, as is our custom, is to ask Professor Root if he wants to make some comment to Professor Wilmeth's statement.

PROF. ROOT: I think that Professor Wilmeth's statement, in its fine clarity, proves exactly what I said. It seems to me that Professor Wilmeth is speaking for the sociologists of America as he says, in his emphasis, that society -- that the group -- that the mass -- is a more important thing and is the primary thing. To me, that is not the truth. I believe, with Emerson, that every institution is only the length and shadow of a great man. I affirm that the greatness of America lies always in that self reliance and in that emphasis, not upon the group, but upon the man who makes the culture of the group, who leads to the glory of the group and so I affirm again individualism.

PROF. WILMETH: I spell out a little bit what mean when I say that the group is a prior fact for the sociologist to study and it's a prior fact in his thinking. In order to do this, I may have to say some things that may sound obvious. We sociologists have quite a difficult time, as a matter of fact, in deciding when to say what we want to say. Some of the things that we think need to be said are shrugged off -- well, everybody knows that, that's obvious. And yet, on other occasions, they are the basis for rather vigorous argument. This is the way that I think and I do not presume to speak for all sociologists. Believe it or not, Professor Root, there are individualists in the American Sociological Society. The human infant, when he is born, depends upon society for his very existence. He has no humanity. He learns to become a human being. His lessons, however, are set by the society in which he is born. This accumulated knowledge that he must learn a part of is what we call culture. Men live in groups

and these groups depend for their very survival on culture. The whole area of social science, as I see it, is concerned with the consequences of these facts. So for every person, the group exists as an important prior fact. As the father said to his son when the father was objecting to the little boy's table manners, "Please eat with your fork," and the little boy said, "Fingers were made before forks, daddy," and daddy said, "Not yours."

PROF. ROOT: I still feel that Professor Wilmeth is overemphasizing the importance of a culture or the group. To me, it is the great man, it is the genius, it is the individual inspiration that originally makes the culture. It was not the culture that created a Vincent Van Gogh -- it was a Vincent Van Gogh that enriched the culture. The culture of our Western world depends upon the great Greeks, upon the Hebrew Bible. It depends also upon Shakespeare and these are monuments of individualism. It is out of that reservoir of the genius of the individual man that the greatness of the world comes.

PROF. WILMETH: To that I would simply say that even the contribution of the very greatest is of very small importance compared to the conservation of social values, the conservation of social organization which make society a growing concern on which we all depend for our very existence. And the thing that impresses me with the United States of America, as I said in my opening statement, is the fact that it offers opportunities for choice to a considerably greater extent than, I believe, any other part of the world. And the reason we have these opportunities for choice is as individuals we have a society which gives us these opportunities for choice, but our rights to have these choices are protected by government.

PROF. ROOT: That was created by our Founding Fathers who were rugged individualists. They said that the function of government was to see that we men kept hands off each other, but that government keep its hands off us. Now, that is individualism, and it seems to me that the thing that you like in society and in our culture is exactly what I am talking about. It is that something that was created by free men who desired that society should remain a society of free men. It all goes back to the primacy of the individual. Society comes second, the individual comes first. It is for the sake of the individual that society exists. We are not a society of bees and ants in which the good of the hive or the heap is the primary thing. We exist that men may be men, and women, women -- that we may be individuals -- that we may grow in our own free and creative way. That is individualism.

PROF. WILMETH: All right, and I say that individualism exists only insofar as it is underwritten by the society in which we exist as individuals.

DR. WITMAN: I gather that the point at which we are at the moment is that Professor Root feels that you determine the definition of individualism and where you stand in this connection in relationship to the role of government and its controls over mankind; and he believes the stress should be made on the whole developing society, on the individual and the freedom of the individual to evolve and develop. Is that a fair statement of your position in a nutshell?

PROF. ROOT: Politically, yes.

DR. WITMAN: All right, and on the other hand, Prof. Wilmeth takes the position of stressing the importance of the group. Now, I think what we have to do here. . .

PROF. WILMETH: I say that we have rights as individuals because we have a Constitution of the United States and a government to enforce those rights.

PROF. ROOT: And we have a Constitution because we had men with the insight and the courage to create that Constitution. The Constitution is the result of the

genius, of the endeavor of free men, of brave men who knew their way and set it down for us.

PROF. WILMETH: I suggest the moderator decide who is the hen and who is the egg.

DR. WITMAN: That is an utterly impossible problem to resolve, but I do want to break in and have you start talking about what you think the colleges are doing about this. You are, I think, clearly positing your respective positions but now our question for discussion tonight is "Are the Colleges Suppressing Individualism?" and I want to know what you think. You have indicated whether you like individualism or not, but are the colleges doing anything about it, one way or the other?

PROF. ROOT: They ignore it, or they have sort of a conspiracy of silence about it because there is a kind of hypnosis in the air. It's everywhere, I admit, but our colleges should be islands of light. They should be above the mundane battle. They should not be swayed by the wave of the future or the wave of the present. Our colleges should be critical of the trends of the day and the trends of the day favor collectivism. Therefore, our colleges, especially today, have the responsibility of being above that battle and of giving us critical light which we need.

PROF. WILMETH: I would go back to what Dr. Witman said about the importance of what we believe about the role of government in this whole discussion. I am quite sure that many of the things that Professor Root calls "collectivism," and thus values very negatively because he calls them "collectivism," are things which I would look upon as further increasing the range of choice of individuals and thus increasing their opportunities to express themselves.

PROF. ROOT: It seems to me that our colleges do not emphasize enough the very important words of Ibsen. Ibsen said, you remember, in "An Enemy of the People,"... "He is the strongest who stands most alone." We need more emphasis on that. Instead of that, in our textbooks, in our lectures, again and again and again and again we have this emphasis on the mass, the society, the group as they determine it and it seems to me that if that does exist, it is not a good thing and we need a fair expression of the other side which I personally believe we do not get today -- the side of individualism.

PROF. WILMETH: At the risk of being repetitious -- which we all are, we're professors, that's the way we make lectures last fifty minutes, you know -- I'd like to say that I consider that society good which offers the widest possible range of choices for the person, -- opportunities to choose what he shall do to earn a living -- opportunities to choose what he shall do for aesthetic enjoyment -- opportunities of all kinds, all varieties. And I would thus look upon society which gave the lonely man a chance to stand alone and be heard as the good society and that is the point which I think is constantly neglected. I think that we have in this country gotten a rather distorted notion of what the individual does and can do all by himself -- notions about the self-made man and all that sort of thing. I'd go even further and say that I think one of the reasons that we have a great deal of trouble in the field of marriage and divorce these days is that we have individualism run rampant, that is, a person considers what he wishes to do more important than the institution of the family and most of us tend to agree with him, if he's a friend of ours. We may deplore divorce in general, but my neighbor across the street who got a divorce -- well, he just couldn't be expected to live with that wife anyway. The expression of the individual, the rights of the individual, I think, are at fundamental odds here with the continuation of the institution of the family.

DR. WITMAN: We have to stick to our colleges -- don't get us off too far into the family.

PROF. WILMETH: I'd like to say that because we have been accused in our marriage and family courses of preaching divorce and that is not true.

DR. WITMAN: Let's see what you two gentlemen can do with this question, which was sent in by one of our listeners last week, and is this week's winner of the American Peoples Encyclopedia. The question was sent in by E. H. Blichfeldt of St. Petersburg, Florida and this is the question. "Since moral principles and approved rules of conduct bear inevitably on the individual, has not formal education always involved and must it not always involve a measure of indoctrination -- that is to say, modification of individualism?"

PROF. WILMETH: I think I have already answered the question "yes" a number of times. The colleges are a part of society -- I said at the very outset that in every society we have to agree on some things that have to be done, other things that are forbidden and college functioning is a part of society and must be in agreement with those very basic things that we all insist upon or that we all prohibit. But I would emphasize that the affirmative aspect of my position is the really more important one. The person standing alone without any social association whatever might be looked upon as some kind of an ideal type of individualist. I am sure thought that Professor Root, in his classes, has sometimes referred to "Gray's Elegy" and that famous passage we all learned in school about the flower born to blush unseen and waste its fragrance on the desert air -- that is what the isolated individual is.

PROF. ROOT: I don't want the individualist to be isolated, but I do want him to be individually creative. It seems to me that this excellent question can easily be answered by saying that surely to the individualist, the wisest tradition of humanity, the universal reason which lies in all men must be appealed to most surely -- but we want it by inward growth, we want it to come by the response of the person himself, we want the inward growth and response of the individual to be the thing that gives the real meaning and the real value to the tradition of the idea.

DR. WITMAN: Professor Root, as I understand it, your reply to this question is that you think the colleges should not indoctrinate. Is that correct?

PROF. ROOT: I don't like the word "indoctrination." I don't think that they should indoctrinate. I do think that they should train, as Professor Bestor suggests, in his great book "The Recreation of Learning," that they should emphasize the basic cultures and rationality and reason of human beings that lie in the individual.

DR. WITMAN: I think we better get down here now to the audience and begin getting questions up to these speakers from the floor. I'll start with this gentlemen.

QUESTIONER: Professor Root, if we are suppressing the individualism of the student, what are we substituting in its place?

PROF. ROOT: We are substituting, it seems to me, a sort of mass hypnosis and conformity. Not many people know that there is an intercollegiate society of individualists. That is the sort of thing that we need but it is not encouraged and instead of that we get a sort of closed mind, it seems to me, in which only one side of the thesis is presented.

QUESTIONER: Yet, Dr. Root, colleges are producing the leadership of our country today in a large measure. If we are suppressing individualism and advising or teaching or bringing about conformity and yet we are getting this leadership, how do you account for it?

PROF. ROOT: I am not sure we are always getting the leadership.

QUESTIONER: If these statistics are true, published in the "National Association of Manufacturers Magazine" that 70% of the business executives listed in "Who's Who in America" come from our liberal arts colleges, it would seem to me that we are getting a leadership there.

PROF. ROOT: I think it would be a greater leadership if they knew more fairly both sides of the question about which they might exercise their leadership. It seems to me that very often to talk about economics, our students today do not really learn what capitalism, if I may use the word -- I prefer free enterprise -- really is. Our textbooks, I would say in 75% to 85% of the cases, are on the side of collectivism and not of individualism. If that is so, how can these leaders, if you call them leaders, really wisely and fully understand both sides? I'm pleading for freedom of speech. I'm pleading for a balanced and harmonious understanding and I believe we do not get it today.

QUESTIONER: Dr. Wilmeth, is it a failure of our colleges that many young people, upon graduation, avoid accepting positions of great individual responsibility.

PROF. WILMETH: I didn't know that that was the case. I don't know what the basis for your assertion is. Perhaps you would like to clarify that just a little bit.

QUESTIONER: Yes, I would. It has the opinion of various college deans, and they worry sometimes about their young people, that in going out they prefer to take a job that doesn't carry with it the responsibility of themselves. For instance, the teaching profession and many of them prefer to do piece work in some factory after they have gone through four years of training.

PROF. WILMETH: You mean they would rather be teachers than school administrators?

QUESTIONER: Yes, or even the responsibility of a teacher. Sometimes they prefer to accept some job that doesn't need their education, which is a shame.

PROF. WILMETH: I wasn't aware that that was a problem to the extent which you seem to imply. If that is the case, I should be very disturbed about it too.

DR. WITMAN: TOWN MEETING'S host here at Nebraska Wesleyan University is Dr. A. Leland Forrest who was appointed Chancellor here a year ago. I can't think of anyone who would have a more devastating question or a more penetrating one to ask one or both of you gentlemen, and I see he is waiting to ask a question. May we ask Dr. Forrest for his question.

DR. FORREST: I'd like to direct this question to Mr. Wilmeth. He has an interesting definition of individualism in the first sentence of his presentation. We are all familiar with the concept that individualism is an exercise of a choice where a range of choices is available and agree that it occurs only where society provides opportunity to choose. But he then states that our task is to decide whether the possibilities for choice are more restrictive in colleges than in other parts of society. Do we really understand you to mean that that is the crux of our problem of the restriction of individual's freedom? Do we understand it if we find colleges no more restrictive than other parts of society about us -- that we have nothing to fear? Does it follow that there are no inalienable rights of the individual? Mr. Wilmeth, do you actually mean that our task is to find out if colleges are no more restrictive than other parts of society and, if so, does this mean that society and its colleges may become increasingly collectivized, as long as colleges are no worse and have no greater climate of fear and of conformity than the rest of society about them. That's

a three pronged question but as directed to this point, do you actually mean that we have nothing to fear if we are no worse than society about us?

PROF. WILMETH: No!

DR. WITMAN: It is customary to say in a situation like that -- does that satisfy you, Sir?

DR. FORREST: I did not read correctly then your first statement which states that we are to find out if colleges are not freer than the rest of society about us. Is that not a part of your opening statement?

PROF. WILMETH: My opening statement proceeds from the title, "Are Our Colleges Suppressing Individualism?" The answer to the question would be Yes, if the colleges offered a more restricted range of choices than any other part of our society. I went on to say, in the latter part of my statement, that in my opinion there is a greater range of choice available on our college campuses today than in almost any other institution of our society that I can think of and that's good and I like it that way.

DR. FORREST: Just one brief statement -- I believe that it is not our place to try to find which kettle is blacker but to find if there are ways in which a greater sense of individual responsibility and freedom can be infused throughout society, both within the college and without.

PROF. WILMETH: I agree.

DR. WITMAN: Professor Root, do you, by chance, wish to make any comment on this point? It is a very crucial question in relation to the overall question we are discussing.

PROF. ROOT: I think I do. In my book, I define both individualism and collectivism this way. I use the American College Dictionary which defines collectivism as -- the socialist principle of control by the people collectively or the state of all means of production or economic activity, -- which I think also means control of the artistic, intellectual and the spiritual, because he who pays the piper calls the tune and if the state does so, the state controls. I define individualism this way -- a social theory, advocating the liberty, rights or independent action of the individual, -- and it seems to me that all true liberals everywhere must be naturally on the side of individualism and the destiny of the precious individual human soul.

QUESTIONER: Dr. Root, is it not true that the individualist, taught by the rote method, does not lose his individualism but sees the subject through an added viewpoint?

PROF. ROOT: I believe that the individualist who is a real individualist with genius will always be so, but I do believe that we can encourage that and make his contribution greater if we have around him an atmosphere, a sort of psychological or spiritual climate in which he can flourish and I would say that this is what our colleges should offer to us. If they do, it's good. If they don't, I think they should change.

QUESTIONER: Dr. Wilmeth, the recent trend in college classes has been to use objective examinations more and more, in which the student can make no original contribution of his own. He is forced merely to accept or reject the opinion of the ideas of others. I wonder whether you feel that this is a suppression of individualism?

PROF. WILMETH: If we had another hour, we could discuss educational theory and practice. I would simply say, with respect to the use of objective examinations,

that they are increasingly used as a response to the fact that we have larger and larger bodies of students and we have to take care of these students as best we can. Ideally, the best way to carry on an examination is one student at a time and conduct the examination orally. That's my opinion.

QUESTIONER: Prof. Root, what can you suppress in an individual?

PROF. ROOT: In my book I give you instances of brave individual students who, because they were individualists, were suppressed, were hurt, were kept from graduation, were given lower marks. I think they continued to be individualists -- indeed, knowing them I know that they did -- but I think that's too bad. I don't want to see that happen. I'm all on the side of the student and his freedom and, it seems to me, that we need to emphasize that. We cannot suppress, thank God, the basic genius that lies within the human spirit but we can discourage it and I don't want it to be discouraged. I think if we do not discourage it, we will have more and more men of greatness in art, in literature, in philosophy and in education.

QUESTIONER: Dr. Wilmeth, is individualism being a non-conformist or is it living to develop to the fullest our God-given abilities?

DR. WILMETH: I am not sure that I can answer that question as emphatically or as briefly as I answered the Chancellor's question. In other words, you are saying should we emphasize the positive or simply the negative aspects of individualism. Individualism is to be not this, not that, to be not something else or -- positively -- to be this, or that, or something else that we actually strive for, work for and attain. I would much prefer the positive definition.

QUESTIONER: Dr. Root, do you think individualism is suppressed more in liberal arts colleges or in specialized schools?

~~etc~~ PROF. ROOT: I think it is too widely spread in all institutions of learning. I do not say it is everywhere, because that would be foolish. I say it is too prevalent and I'm not sure whether it is more prevalent in the specialized or in the liberal arts colleges. It should be the least in the liberal arts colleges because the liberal arts colleges, especially the church related colleges, are our hope.

QUESTIONER: Dr. Wilmeth, with all the academic courses that are required courses, how can you say that a student has so much freedom in choosing his college curriculum?

DR. WILMETH: You happen to be living at a time when the pendulum is swinging in the direction of rather more requirements. I went to college at a time when the pendulum was swinging away from requirements and it is a matter that you and I will have to decide whether I was the more fortunate or you are the more fortunate. Let me simply say this very briefly. I went clear through college without ever taking a course in laboratory science for which I am very regretful but the system of free electives, relatively free that prevailed at that time made it possible for me to get away with it. I would prefer that we have a little bit more balanced system of requirements.

QUESTIONER: Dr. Root, what, in your opinion, is the effect of specific course requirements on student individualism?

PROF. ROOT: I, myself, am for a rather wide choice. I would say I prefer that students should have it. What I don't like is increasingly, it seems to me, a correlation of courses in which, for example, we in English sometimes are supposed to teach so that it feeds into a social science course and just reemphasizes social ideas. That's one reason I am for individualism. This emphasis entirely and always on the word "social" "social" "social," -- it gets very monotonous to me.

QUESTIONER: Do your own courses in English require it at Earlham College?

PROF. ROOT: We have required courses and, of course, some courses must be required. I say, insofar as it is possible, I am always in favor of as much choice as possible for the students.

QUESTIONER: Dr. Wilmeth, how can colleges reduce the emphasis on grades and enable students to show acquisition of subject matter. I have in mind a professor who said that a professor's advancement would be determined by the number of books he wrote and how can professors do justice to their students when they have to spend so much time writing books?

DR. WILMETH: I think your question points up very nicely the point of view that I took at the very outset here. We cannot get very far by telling a student... well, don't be concerned about grades, be concerned with what you actually learn in the course. And he is going to say....but, over in medical school, they are going to look at my grades so I am concerned about grades. It's conditions beyond the individual person that force upon the student this very great concern with grades and so I would say the place to operate is not on the student here -- oh, don't be worried about grades -- we can't say that to him and be honest. We simply can't. If we actually think that it would be better for our students to be more concerned with what they are doing than with the grade in the course, then we should make some very significant changes in the way we assign grades and in the way we use them after we assign them. That's the place where we have to start operating -- not on the individual student.

QUESTIONER: Dr. Root, I would like to change the tense of the question this evening to the future. Will mass education at the college level, toward which we are now moving rapidly, tend to suppress individualism?

PROF. ROOT: It will tend to suppress it, unless we know that it is doing so, and use all our resources and all our wisdom and all our energy and courage to see that the other side is emphasized and is given its proper place. If we do, I am hopeful for the future because I am, by nature, an optimist.

QUESTIONER: Dr. Wilmeth, don't you think that the materialism of today, along with the emphasis in colleges on taking only subjects that will help you earn a living, are quite deadly and suppressing individualism?

PROF. WILMETH: That is a difficult subject always to discuss. It is very popular for those of us who are professors to say to students... now, you are here to learn how to make yourselves a rich life and not to earn a living. And the students say back to us....but you're earning a living telling me that. The thing that I would like to say is that the material side of life is very important if you haven't solved the questions there. It is very important to decide how you are going to earn a living but after you have solved that problem to your moderate satisfaction, then other things become important. It is a very important prior consideration for young people and I sympathize deeply with them in their concern for it. I would be very disappointed, however, if they had no resources to live a rich life after they had begun to earn a living.

QUESTIONER: Dr. Root, to what extent has the fear of Communism and of being branded a Communist influenced the suppression of individualism on college and university campuses?

PROF. ROOT: I don't think it really has hurt it at all. It seems to me that the issue of Communism is something about which we don't need to worry particularly if we realize it is simply an alien conspiracy of militant will and say that one who actually and outrightly teaches communism hasn't any place on the free American academic scene. But aside from that, and it should always be those who only really teach

communism and who are Communists, then it seems to me we should not fear free discussion of any sort and it does not need to frighten us.

QUESTIONER: Dr. Root, is it possible that public opinion or pressure could be a factor in suppressing individualism?

PROF. ROOT: Oh, of course, but the real rugged individualists of whom I hope I am one, are never swayed too much by public opinion. I've always gone my own way. I shall always go my own way and I intend to die so as I lived so. But I do think, of course, that public opinion is something that we have to realize is a factor around us and is a difficulty.

PROF. WILMETH: May I say that I think Professor Root should be continuingally greatful for the opportunity to go his own way, as he says he has gone.

QUESTIONER: Professor Wilmeth, is the increasing tendency of the United States citizens to seek economic security in the form of pensions and unemployment compensation a reflection of suppression of individualism by our colleges.

PROF. WILMETH: If that question had come earlier, it could have provided the basis for the discussion of the entire evening. I'm glad it came, even at this late moment, and what I said in response to the earlier question I think would give some notion of how I would respond to this one. It's very important to solve your economic problems and as long as you don't have them solved, you don't have very much opportunity for other choices unless, of course, you want to join the Hobos Association of America or something of that kind. Once then are solved, then other things come up that are very important and I hope we have the resources to meet those too.

QUESTIONER: Dr. Root, is it possible to gain a full, well-rounded education without some suppression of individualism?

PROF. ROOT: I should say certainly without suppression. I don't want suppression of anything. To train individualism, to perhaps discipline individualism, to guide individualism -- certainly. But suppress -- no, I don't believe in the suppression of individualism.

QUESTIONER: Dr. Wilmeth, in living in our present civilization, in which we find the individual forced to certain confirmation of the mass by social pressure, where would you say that the ethical social pressure stops and where does depression begin?

PROF. WILMETH: Unfortunately, that is not a question to which I can give a quick answer. About the only answer you can give is the classic one given in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, that one's individualism should stop where another's individualism is interfered with, but I know that doesn't say very much.

DR. WITMAN: Well, that's a nice balanced point, however, in which to bring this broadcast to a conclusion and I want to tell you how very much we appreciated your contribution, Professor Root, and your contribution, Professor Wilmeth, and the fine help of all of these people who had questions to ask.

Our thanks to the hosts for this TOWN MEETING at Nebraska Wesleyan University, Chancellor A. Leland Forrest; Fred Hess, Jr., Director of Public Relations; Miss Janet George, president of the student body; Dr. Sam Dahl and Dick Chapin and his staff at Station KFOR.